

THE NEW MEDICINE FOR POVERTY
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the prevention of enclosure was now discredited as the programme of a sect of religious and political radicals*

When Major-General Whalley in 1656 introduced a measure to regulate and restrict the enclosure of commons, framed, apparently, on the lines proposed by the authorities of Leicester, there was an instant outcry from members that it would "destroy property/" and the bill was refused a second reading."¹

After the Restoration the tide began to run more strongly in the same direction. Enclosure had already become the hobby of the country gentleman.

Experts advocated it on economic grounds, and legislation to facilitate it was introduced into Parliament* Though its technique still remained to be elaborated, the attitude which was to be decisive in the eighteenth century had already been crystallized*

The change of policy was striking. The reason of it was not merely that political conditions made the landed gentry omnipotent, and that the Royalist squirearchy, who streamed back to their plundered manors in 1660, were in no mood to countenance a revival, by the Government of Charles II, of the administrative interference with the rights of property which had infuriated them in the Government of Charles I

It was that opinion as to social policy had changed, and changed not least among men of

religion themselves. The pursuit of economic self-interest, which **is** the law of nature, is already coming to be identified by the pious with the operation of the providential plan, which is the law of God. Enclosures will increase the output of wool and grain. Each man knows best what his land is suited to produce, and the general interest will be best served by leaving him free to produce it*
¹¹ It is an undeniable maxime that everyone by the light of nature and reason will do that which makes for his greatest advantage. . . . The advancement of private persons will be the advantage of the public, "1"